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AUTHOR Hamm, Durell D.
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ABSTRACT

There is a growing dichotomy between the educational value of forensics versus the competitive aspects of individual events for both coaches and students. Competitive behavior has both an instinctual and a cognitive source. The instinctual source can be traced to evolution in a fiercely competitive world. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that the root of competitive behavior is in a diffuse and pervasive aggressive instinct. M. May and L. Doob's cognitive theory of competition heavily emphasizes the concept of the level of aspiration. L. Festinger's social comparison process theory posits a universal drive toward self-evaluation of opinions and abilities. The compromise between the need for personal gratification and the need for social acceptance that is appropriate to most life situations is inappropriate to competitive forensics. Forensics teams, coaches, and competitors of the future are going to continue to overshadow the educational goals that were originally set forth by the forefathers of speech and debate competition. The stakes for competing have risen dramatically and the educational aspects of the activity have fallen away and been replaced by a dedication to victory at all costs. Forensics is a safe and organized outlet for the unleashing of aggressive drives. Teachers and educators need to be teaching students that competition is always going to be pervasive and it is possible to have a good time without turning the playing field into a battlefield. (RS)

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Forensics In The Year 2000:

Competition versus Educational Values

Durell D. Hamm

Northern Kentucky University

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Introduction

We all know college forensics is an exciting program that encourages students to explore and cultivate skills through competition. We have come to recognize these contests as a series of activities that are designed to help students learn more about communication by using the methods of research, voice and bodily action, with literary content and the arts. Students make communication come alive as their research leads to imaginative programs of oral interpretation, original speaking performances, and enhanced verbal skills while sharpening and developing their communication skills through educational values. Dr. Jack Kay said that the original intent of forensic activities was a goal-directed rather than process-directed endeavor. He claimed that students got involved for many of the reasons I have already mentioned. Forensics was seen as a laboratory for learning skills and practices they perceived to be vital to success in public life (61).

And many of these aspects are true today; however, there seems to be an increasing philosophical concern that needs to be addressed in order to understand forensics competition of the future as we look to the year 2000 and

beyond. There is a growing dichotomy between the educational value of forensics versus the competitive aspects of Individual Events for both coaches and students. So that we get a clear understanding of this ever increasing controversy within the forensic community, I will define what competition is and how it exists in our society, and I will discuss the use of forensics as competition. Finally, I will draw some conclusions regarding competition and forensics as we approach the twenty-first century.

Literature Review

There have been numerous articles in the forensic journals that emphasize the need for a stronger focus on the educational values of forensics. The second National Developmental Conference on Forensics in 1990 discussed the philosophical concern of the dual education/competitive aspects of Individual Events for students and coaches. Once again, this discussion led to a higher awareness of the educational value while down playing the ever increasing competitive aspects of forensics which seem to have the most adverse effects on the present interest level. Kiser presented a paper at the 76th SCA convention where he said that competitive forensics should develop good leadership traits (21). Sellnow stated that in order to improve the quality and quantity of speech competition, that forensics must emphasize its educational value (13). Finally, Rasmuson explored the relationship between competition theory and forensic speech contests as it relates to thought transfer. He felt

that students learn communication theory, modify speeches by studying judges' comments, and that students who study what is taught are awarded (15). Having found very little research in forensics regarding the competitive aspect and why students compete, I set out my own quest to find out why competition has continued to gained momentum while the educational aspects have taken a back seat in forensics.

Competition Theory Defined

When I began to explore the literature on competition, I found an abundance of studies in social psychology and some in our own interpersonal communication literature that evolved out of social comparison theory. But the most compelling literature kept referring to the instinctual and cognitive basis for competitive behavior and the work of Charles Darwin on evolution. Darwin, of course, was not interested in examining the nature and basis of competitive behavior but rather in formulating a scientific theory of the origin of the species. However, he put forward in his theory the belief that different forms of life emerged by gradual modification from the same common source and, under the process of "natural selection", the emergent forms came to be quite distinctive. When we think of natural selection, we think that species either developed or became extinct in the context of competition with other species for resources necessary for life. Darwin wrote:

> New and improved varieties (of species) will inevitably supply and

> exterminate the older, less improved, and intermediate varieties...Dominant species belonging to the larger groups within each class tend to give birth to new and dominant forms...But as all groups cannot thus go on increasing in size, for the world would not hold them, the more dominant groups beat the less dominant.
>
> This tendency in the large groups to go on increasing in size and diverging in character, together with the inevitable contingency of much extinction, explains the arrangement of all the forms of life in groups subordinate to groups, all within a few great classes, which has prevailed throughout all time (p.252).

In a world of limited resources, in which each species tends to multiply inordinantly, it is only the fittest competitors that survive. Among the older animals, competitive behavior is clearly instinctive, and clearly serve the purpose of survival. If one believes that homosapiens are biological descendants of the lower animals and have and continue to face by threats to their biological existence, it is reasonable to conclude that dominance is, in part, a function of innate instinctual competitiveness.

A second source for understanding the instinctual dimension of competitive behavior among humans comes from psychoanalytic theory. Freud posited two basic instincts in man, sex and aggression. Both instincts served the function of survival; the sexual drive insure the survival of the species, and aggression serves the purpose of individual survival (1957).

On the other hand, A. O. Rorty believed that competition is developed out of conflict. Not only the soldier, but also the salesperson, teacher, mother, father, and even the forensicator are encouraged to be competitive because they learn that aggressive competition is praiseworthy and useful (499).

Many social theorists add that competitive behavior serves as a needed instrument of social change in highly structured societies. Classical economic theory offers a further basis for understanding the institutional support of competitive behavior in society. It posits a natural order, beneficent to society, in which provision is made for both individual and social well-being through a motivating principle innate to us which prompts us to seek to better our condition. To the degree that the things which make life better are relatively scarce, each of us finds ourselves a competitor for goods that others also seek. Each individual, aiming only at his private gain, is led by "an indivisible hand:" to promote public good. Human institutions that interfere with this principle in the name of public interest defeat their own best intentions. Thus classical theory vies completion not only as the observed fact, but also as something congenial to human good. The economic theorist Adam Smith wrote in his book The Wealth of Nations:

> Every individual endeavors to employ his capital so that its produce may be of greatest value. He generally neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. He intends only his

> own security, his own gain. And he is in this led by an "invisible hand" to promote an end which was no part of his intuition. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually then when he really intends to promote it (1985).

Classical theory represents not only the way in which a large and influential sector of economists view economic life in society, it represents, implicitly or explicitly , a normative view that is passed on to succeeding generations of college students and which has helped to buttress the mores of competitive enterprise.

The Cognitive Basis Of Competitive Behavior

May and Doob embrace the idea of competition and cooperation. These authors view competition and cooperation as different forms of goal oriented behavior. We strive, according to the authors, because our desires (aspirations) exceed our present level of attainment (achievement). We strive to close the gap between our desire to achieve and our achievement only to increase the level of attainment. The authors also suggests that we are really seeking either social prestige or self-expression in achieving certain levels of aspiration when we compete vigorously. For to beat a rival is a form of prestige and satisfaction in most cultures, and especially in our own.

One of the most important elements of this theory revolves around an

activity involving two or more individuals or groups, as if one individual or group could determine the amount of interaction. While it is probably true that one individual or group can force the mode of behavior to be competitive, it is clearly not the case that one individual or group can force the other to be cooperative. Whether others will compete or cooperate, therefore, may largely be determined by the actions that their co-actor(s) take. For example, if the co-actor behaves competitively, even if our subject is inclined to cooperate, sees the goals as shareable in equal amounts, sees no rule forbidding him to cooperate nor compelling him to compete, and feels that his goal can only be reached by cooperation, he will nevertheless, in all likelihood, find himself competing. competition, in short, is the default condition for our society; unless both parties specify in advance that they want to cooperate, and give strong signals that they will cooperate, competition will result.

Festinger's Social Comparison Theory

The final source of understanding human competitive behavior is that of Social Comparison Theory as developed by L. Festinger (1989). While Festinger does not state his theory in competitive terms, through interpersonal communication, we may reasonably assume competitive dynamics to be one of the forces operating in the behavior he describes.

Festinger asserts, that in the human organism there exists a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities. In the case of ability thee is a drive to

achieve higher and higher ranking, whereas in the case of opinions, the drive is to locate oneself near the center of opinion ranking.

Festinger also asserts that a person's cognition about the situation in which she exists and her appraisals of what she is capable of doing (her evaluation of her abilities) will together have bearing on her behavior. Festinger observes that the holding of incorrect opinions and/or inaccurate appraisals of one's abilities can be punishable, or even fatal, in many situations. In a parallel manner she might have added that the holding of accurate appraisals of one's abilities may be very rewarding in situations. In any event, Festinger makes clear that people are either seeking rewards or avoiding punishment. The focus of this instrumental behavior can be either primitive (directed at survival) or refined (directed at the enhancement of life). It can be conscious, reflecting a hedonistic orientation, or unconscious, reflecting a habit structure.

Festinger posits that a person will seek first objective, non-social means of evaluation; lacking such a means she will seek comparison with others; and lacking that, evaluation of abilities will be unstable. We may infer that the absence of stable evaluation by a person is uncomfortable and that is one reason why individuals seek out opportunities to make evaluations.

Festinger declares that in the case of social comparisons the person will prefer, for comparison, someone who is close to his own ability. S/He will be more attracted when others are near equals in ability than when they are much better or much worse. S/He will make more effort to change her/his own

ability ranking and the ability ranking of others when an important ability is under consideration than when an unimportant ability is under consideration. There will be a tendency to cease comparing oneself with those in the group who are very different from oneself.

It is suggested that competition lies at the root of much of the behavior which Festinger describes. Indeed that very notion of comparison processes suggest a competitive attitude. Thus it is argued that Festinger's theory is descriptive, in large measure, of the dynamics of competition in a group setting. This competition is tempered, however, by the need for cohesiveness in the group, which would be seriously threatened by unrestrained competition.

Summary of the Theory of Competition

In the foregoing theoretical presentation, I have argued strongly that there is both an instinctual and a cognitive source of competitive behavior. The instinctual source has been traced to our evolution in a fiercely competitive world, a world in which only the fittest competitors survived. Similarly, psychoanalytic theory suggest that the root of our competitive behavior is in a diffuse and pervasive aggressive instinct. Competitive behavior is also embedded in the economic mores of western civilization as expressed in classical economic theory derived by Adam Smith (1987).

May and Doob's cognitive theory of competition heavily emphasizes the concept of the level of aspiration where there is a discrepancy between our

level of achievement and our level of aspiration, and our knowledge of the goal that we seek indicates that it is limited and cannot be shared, equally by others. Also, our attitudes produce within ourselves a state in which our favorable attitude toward competition overbalances possible conflicting attitudes toward potential competitors, toward the rules of the situation; finally, our skills, are of such a nature that, under the rules of the situation, we have a reasonable chance of success by competing.

Festinger's Social Comparison Process Theory was discussed in the context of competition. It was observed that Festinger posits a universal drive toward self-evaluation of opinions and abilities. It was suggested that one source of this drive is an individual's need to assess his/her competitive standing vis-a-vis others in his/her interpersonal world and that another source was his/her need to assist his/her potential for future competitive behavior.

Competition Theory Applied to Forensics

Jack Nicklaus says that at about the age of ten he discovered that "Hitting a ball well was a lot more fun than hitting it badly, which made me want to get better at it as quickly as possible." This desire to perform better is a fundamental human feeling. The attainment of competence, at least in primitive societies, is a prerequisite to survival. It is not surprising that we find both the striving toward competence and the demonstration of it enjoyable and once we attain it, we cannot refrain from demonstrating it again and again.

This is also true to forensics. As May and Doob explain, when we attain a level of excellence, then we work to improve that record. This can be observed in highly cohesive forensic teams as well as individual members who strive to extend their own level of achievement. This instinctive behavior has been present in us since infancy. Infants compete with everything outside themselves for the attention of their parents and the control of their world. Children compete with one parent for the affection of the other. Older children compete with one another for the approval of their teachers. Each child competes with his peers for admiration, praise and appreciation. Competition is a satisfying demonstration of creativity, mastery, and courage to young adults.

But for some, competition is a struggle for power that leaves them frightened and failure leaves them with a feeling of helplessness and isolation. Like the concepts associated with argumentation and debate, many adults who have had such experiences avoid competition because they have been told it is bad. Thus, only those who strive for highly competitive settings seek out forensics or other extra curricular activities that nurture the competitive atmosphere.

The compromise between the need for personal gratification and the need for social acceptance that is appropriate to most life situations, is inappropriate to competitive forensics. The only limitation on behavior in a competitor's own best interest should be the rules of the competition. However, most are unable

to be fully spontaneous, to release ourselves from the fears that surround us, or to escape from the extraneous concerns for the approval of others. And worse, for many individuals there is no escape from competing. We have all seen the student and coach who cannot step outside of the competitive setting and say "So much for participation!" As May and Doob stated, they must continue to achieve an appropriate resolution only to reestablish an even higher level of attainment. Or some outside force like a parent, coach, or even an inner drive requires that they return to the frightening experience, to prove to themselves that they are not vulnerable, not weak, that they are tough enough to take it "like a man."

I would argue that forensic teams, coaches, and competitors of the future are going to continue to overshadow the educational goals that were originally set forth by the forefathers of speech and debate competition. There are two important reasons why this will happen. Our western society thrives on competition. There is competition in the multifaceted arenas of education, business, and government. Thomas Stauffer argues in his book Competition And Cooperation In American Higher Education, that competition among institutions are among the principal facts of life in higher education of the 1980's. He says that competition will help to force cooperation and qualitative improvements in higher education (p.3).

For instance, our institutions and individual professors and administrators compete for students, resources, and prestige, but it is also considered a bad

form of academic culture to draw public attention to competition. Competition thus tends not to be recognized in the literature as a principal motivating factor in our society. This analogy can be explained further. Within institutions, students compete for class standing (not to mention social standing); faculty members compete for appointment, promotion, tenure, grants, and publication of research results; administrators compete with various constituencies to influence academic policy; faculty unions-i.e. the recent University of Cincinnati strike; departments and programs compete for scarce resources. Whether it is forensics or athletics, competition is simply a part of academic life.

The alleged lack of competitiveness of American business in international markets is said to be at the root of decline in the United States' productivity rate, inflation, and other maladies. The effect of federal regulations on the competitive position of the United States automobile industry offers up an example of how a market can be bound by environmental, economic, management, social, and other federal and state regulations thus limiting trade and downsizing the competition.

Secondly, we have seen that as the stakes for competing have risen dramatically, the educational aspects of the activity have fallen away and are replaced by a dedication to victory at all costs. How we win takes a back seat to what we win and, in the pursuit of that goal, sportsmanlike conduct gives way to increasing levels of direct and intense aggression.

What effect does this have on competitive behavior? I would speculate

that, first of all, it increases the likelihood of cheating and the use of officially prohibited competitive tools to ensure winning. Such varied techniques include plagiarized speeches, introductions to interpretative literature selections written by coaches, or even debate cases written by professionals. Secondly, it increases the potential level of anxiety and stress on the part of all concerned. Losing a debate round as your coach sits in the round creates a good deal of anxiety for all those involved. What we would like to believe to be an educational experience evolves into hostility and aggression.

And thirdly, it invites confusion about goals and values. It tends to cut down on the variety of styles forensicators are allowed to adopt, and makes the speakers not only directly aggressive, but to some extent "bullies". We have all seen successful forensic squads " with an attitude." A fourth problem with the primacy of winning is that coaches may push their charges too hard. Stanley Eitzen, Sociology Professor at Colorado State University stated that coaches may be physically or emotionally abusive. In this way they may limit their players' civil rights (p.185).

As a former participant in forensics and as a coach today I do not sanction the "Winning At All Cost" philosophy. However, I do believe that as individuals, groups, and societies, we need some form of competitiveness to unleash aggressive drives into safe and organized outlets. I see forensics as one of those outlets.

Conclusions

Competition can damage self-esteem, create anxiety and lead to cheating and hurt feelings. But so can romantic love! No one suggests that we do away with love, rather we must perfect our understanding of what love means.

So too with competition. "to compete" is derived from the Latin competere, meaning "to seek together." As communication philosophers, teachers, and coaches, we must strive to understand that trying to win is not tantamount to trying to belittle; that winning is not wonderful if the process of play in not challenging, fair, or fun. And losing, though at times disappointing, does not connote failure.

Finally, educational goals can be found within the confines of forensic competition. Unless our society and our instincts are altered, competition is always going to exist in the western culture. As teachers and educators, we need to be teaching our students that competition is always going to be pervasive and it is possible to have a good time without turning the "playing field" into a "battlefield." The impetus of this paper was to gain a clearer understanding of why competition overshadows educational values in forensics. I believe Dr. Benjamin Spock explained it best when he stated in Newsweek:

> that parents should raise their children not primarily to get ahead but to serve, to cooperate, and to be kind. By far the most disturbing force in America today, to my mind, is excessive competitiveness. It keeps people obsessed with their jobs and with personal advancement. It

> encourages parents to downgrade the family. Instead we should raise our children to feel that family ties are the most rewarding values; that social, cultural and community activities can be deeply satisfying, and that the gratification from income and prestige in a majority of jobs these days is shallow by comparison (106).

If Dr. Spock is right, we will continue to see an increasing number of competitive programs in our forensic societies and a decreasing emphasis of educational values in the years to come.

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